

Saskatchewan · Q&A

'I don't think we've done all we can to save lives': Sask. bishop blasts government's COVID-19 response

Anglican Bishop Michael Hawkins survived a near-fatal COVID-19 infection late last year

[Jason Warick](#) · CBC News · Posted: Apr 09, 2021 5:00 AM CT | Last Updated: April 9



Anglican Diocese of Saskatchewan Bishop Michael Hawkins, who nearly died of COVID-19 and spent several days in an intensive care unit, is frustrated the provincial government is not doing more to curb the virus's spread. (Jason Warick/CBC)



A prominent religious leader is calling Saskatchewan's COVID-19 response "morally reprehensible."

Bishop Michael Hawkins presides over the Anglican Diocese of Saskatchewan, which covers Prince Albert and all Anglican churches north of it in the province. He survived a near-fatal COVID-19 infection late last year that required two lengthy stays in the intensive care unit.

Hawkins spoke to CBC reporter Jason Warick about his frustration with provincial policies, and about the misconception that religious leaders are lobbying for restrictions to be lifted.

The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

CBC: How do you feel the COVID-19 pandemic is being handled in the province?

Hawkins: At the moment, I'm very concerned with the situation in Regina. But ICU and hospitalization numbers are increasing across areas of the province in ways that are alarming.

The half-measures we've adopted thus far will be ineffective. I don't think we've done all we can to save lives or protect the lives of the people of this province. I think other priorities have gotten in the way.

I fully reject any attempt to balance the economy with human life. It goes against all that I believe and think as a human being, let alone as a Christian.

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You feel there has been too much emphasis on the economy, that the scale is tipped too far in that direction?

I feel terrible for people whose livelihoods and life savings have been jeopardized by this pandemic. We have not all been in this together. Some have suffered much greater financial impacts.

At the same time, I think it's morally reprehensible we have prioritized keeping bars open — I don't mean any ill-will to people that own or work in those businesses — while life-saving

medical interventions and tests are delayed for a year for so many people. That scares me about our priorities as a province, and I don't think the government thought that out clearly enough.

I don't think we're doing all we can to save lives.

An Anglican bishop in Saskatchewan is encouraging everyone to get vaccinated for COVID-19 as soon as they can, but to remain vigilant about public health measures in the meantime. (Evan Mitsui/CBC)

You were hospitalized twice after contracting COVID-19. Does this affect your views?

Yes, my view of this is clouded by my own experience. The person in the bed beside me died from COVID. One of my priests died from COVID just this past week. A man who cared for him died as well.

People are dying in our province because of this disease. I, and I think a lot of other people, are willing to do much more to save lives.

Do you think that's still a good idea for churches to hold in-person services?

I'm very nervous about that. We were closed (last year) through Christmas and until February. We exceeded the provincial guidelines. I would say about half our churches (in his diocese) have opened now for regular Sunday gathering. Many have chosen to stay closed.

At Easter, I made a special appeal for people to be careful. I think we all need to go beyond the minimum requirements. But I took all the precautions and still managed to get sick.

Are you at the point where you should close in-person church services?

I don't think we're there yet (in Northern Saskatchewan). At the first sign we're headed in the same direction as Regina, we need to act before. We have not acted strongly to stop this disease. Alberta, Manitoba have taken drastic action. We seem to shy away from that.

- [Sask. man calls on province to tweak vaccination priorities after close call with COVID](#)

If you think there should be more action, what do you think is preventing it?

I don't fully understand it, what it is that restrains them. The hesitancy to close down, which has become anathema to them, I can't figure it out.

You say you've spoken with other religious leaders about this. Do they feel the way you do?

I certainly think so. The fringe of religious movements or any movements get all the attention. COVID deniers get more attention than people who care for their neighbours and take precautions. We have not been pushing for things to be wide open. It's not something we're advocating.

Do you have any final thoughts?

I would encourage everyone to take all precautions they can. I'm still suffering from the results of COVID, in my heart and in my brain. There seems to be some permanent damage there. I'd encourage everyone to be safe and to get vaccinated when your turn comes.

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